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Cooperative Extension Service

Managing the Pig Herd

Managing the Pig Herd

Studies that have been made of the cost of producing pork on farms show considerable variation in cost from farm to farm. This is true even on neighboring farms where opportunities appear to be equal.

The only explanation that can be offered for much of this variation is the difference in the skill of the two men as managers.

To manage sows in such a manner that they will produce large litters of pigs is the first step toward having them wean large litters. Studies show conclusively that there is as much profit in one litter of nine pigs as in marketing 24 pigs from four six-pig litters.

Management during gestation, farrowing to weaning, and weaning to market requires skill and application of the operator. The following recommendations will assist during these various phases of production.

GESTATION

A balanced ration for a sow during gestation must provide nutrients (proteins, carbohydrates, fats, and minerals) for five different uses: maintain the tissue of her own body in a state of repair and in functioning condition; supply energy she utilizes in her life processes; develop her unborn litter; build up her body reserves of nutrients against the severe drain of lactation; and in case she is not mature, the ration must provide essential nutrients that will guarantee her own continued growth.

A gain of 75 to 100 pounds for mature sows and of 100 to 125 pounds for gilts during the gestation period is recommended.

Clean up lice and mange now. You can't when sows are nursing pigs. You can spray safely and effectively with chlordane or lindane. Follow directions—don't overdose.

Vaccinate for erysipelas at least 30 days before far-



By LaVerne Kortan, associate Extension livestock specialist

rowing if you didn't get it done before. Protection generally carries over to the pigs.

FARROWING TO WEANING

This is the most critical stage of the pig's life cycle.

Keep all visitors out of your farrowing house. Post signs. Some hog men padlock the doors. Have a footbath at the door for disinfecting shoes for those who do enter.

Clean Stalls or Pens. Remove all manure, then scrub and disinfect. Boiling hot lye water is the most effective and cheapest disinfectant. Cresol products, quarternary ammonia, and chlorohexidine also are effective, and easier to use. Be sure to rinse off metal with clear water if you use corrosive materials such as lye. Live steam and flame throwers are good if you get rid of all manure and debris first.

Scrub Sows with warm, soapy water before moving them into the farrowing quarters. Bring them in 24 hours ahead of farrowing so they get used to new surroundings. It helps avoid farrowing troubles from excited sows. If a wild sow won't settle down, try tranquilizers but use the right dosage.

Check During Farrowing. If a sow labors for 10 hours, she needs help. Wear rubber gloves if you pull pigs. Hormones such as pituitary extracts help sows that fail to milk.

Pig Brooders or heat lamps as a protection measure from cold the first 2 or 3 days of life is particularly important to pigs. The temperature regulating mechanism of their bodies does not begin to function normally until they are about 2 days old. Simple electric pig brooders should be used extensively during cold-weather farrowing.

Baby Pigs Scours (other than TGE) are best controlled by good management. Provide warm, dry bedding and draft-free stalls. Avoid sudden changes in temperatures and in feed. If sows run a fever or become constipated, it can scour their pigs. If pigs break, treat with antibiotics and sulfa drugs.

Use Injectable Iron Compounds at 2 or 4 days of age to prevent anemia. Recent tests indicate that 7 days is too late. One shot will do the job if pigs are eating a well-fortified starter feed at 2 to 3 weeks of age. If they aren't, give a second shot.

Clip Needle Teeth and Castrate at 5 to 6 days of age. Small pigs are easier to handle and suffer less shock.

Creep Feeding beginning the first week is recommended. Provide a creep in which the pigs can feed unmolested by the sows. A palatable well balanced ration containing 17 to 20 per cent crude protein of high quality will give excellent results. Creeps that

are located indoors during early spring or bad weather will give best results.

Best Time to Vaccinate for cholera and and erysipelas depends on weaning age. Never do it under 5 weeks of age, or within 10 days before or after weaning. Vaccinate at 5 to 7 weeks if you wean at 3 weeks or 4 weeks. Vaccinate at 7 to 8 weeks if you wean at 5 to 6.

Vaccinating for cholera and erysipelas at the same time saves handling, but may cause more stress. Let your vet make the decision because it depends on the health of your pigs.

WEANING TO MARKET

You'll have little trouble from weaning to market if you've done a good job up to then. During this growing period provide a well balanced ration. In the heat of the summer provide shade and a water sprinkler system. During the winter provide dry well ventilated quarters. Market at correct weight of 200 to 240 pounds.